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MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE FORTHCOMING MIDDLE EAST DEBATE IN THE U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL:

VOICE: (OPT) NEXT MONDAY THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL WILL BEGIN A DEBATE ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT TURN OUT TO BE PROFITABLE. IT COULD ADVANCE THE CAUSE OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST-- OR IT COULD TURN OUT TO BE ANOTHER ROUND OF STERILE RHETORIC WITHOUT A HINT OF COMPROMISE OR USEFUL INITIATIVE. (END OPT.)

IT WILL BE AN UNUSUAL DEBATE IN THAT THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION WILL TAKE PART. THE PALESTINIANS WERE INVITED A MONTH AGO; THEY MAY SIT AT THE COUNCIL TABLE, MAKE STATEMENTS AND REPLY TO OTHER STATEMENTS-- ALTHOUGH THEY WILL HAVE NO VOTE. IT IS NORMAL FOR THE COUNCIL TO INVITE INTERESTED NON-MEMBER STATES TO TAKE PART IN SUCH DEBATES-- BUT HIGHLY UNUSUAL FOR IT TO INVITE REPRESENTATIVES OF ENTITIES WHICH ARE NOT STATES TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS MANNER. THE INVITATION REFLECTS THE GROWING SUPPORT WHICH THE P.L. O. HAS GAINED IN THE WORLD ORGANIZATION. AND OBVIOUSLY-- WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF THE DEBATE-- THE PALESTINIANS ARE BOUND TO GAIN INCREASED PUBLICITY FOR THEIR CAUSE BY VIRTUE OF BEING ABLE TO EXPOUND THEIR ARGUMENTS IN AN INTERNATIONAL FORUM.

EQUALLY UNUSUAL IS THE FACT THAT ISRAEL WILL NOT TAKE PART. THE ISRAELIS SAID LAST MONTH THAT THEY WOULD NOT ATTEND THE MEETING IF THE P.L. O. DID. BUT THERE HAD BEEN RUMORS THAT THEY MIGHT CHANGE THEIR MIND-- ESPECIALLY SINCE THE UNITED STATES WAS MAKING IT CLEAR THAT IT CONSIDERED THE ISRAELI BOYCOTT TO BE A MISTAKE. BUT LAST SUNDAY THE ISRAELI CABINET VOTED UNANIMOUSLY:

NO PARTICIPATION. (OPT) SO, A UNIQUE CONFRONTATION WILL NOT TAKE PLACE -- THE PRINCIPALS IN THE MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM, AFTER A QUARTER-CENTURY, FACING EACH OTHER IN WHAT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE A DIRECT DEBATE. (END OPT)

THE ISRAELIS DON'T THINK, IN FACT, THAT THE SECURITY COUNCIL -- OR THE UNITED NATIONS, FOR THAT MATTER -- IS THE PROPER PLACE TO DISCUSS THE MIDDLE EAST'S FOREMOST PROBLEM. (OPT) THEY SUGGESTED INSTEAD -- LAST SUNDAY -- THAT THE GENEVA MIDEAST CONFERENCE BE RESUMED. BUT THEY DON'T WANT THE P.L.O. TO TAKE PART IN THAT, EITHER -- AND THEY CAN VETO ANY INVITATION TO THE P.L.O. SINCE THE ARAB COUNTRIES AND THE SOVIET UNION WANT THE P.L.O. TO BE PRESENT, THE PROSPECTS FOR THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ARE NOT GOOD. (END OPT)

BUT WHILE ISRAEL WILL BE ABSENT FROM NEXT WEEK'S DEBATE, IT STILL HAS A PROFOUND INTEREST IN WHAT WILL GO ON THERE. THE ISRAELIS SUSPECT THAT WHAT WILL HAPPEN IS THAT AN ATTEMPT WILL BE MADE TO RE-WORD THE CELEBRATED SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION NUMBER TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY-TWO, PASSED ON NOVEMBER TWENTY-SECOND, NINETEEN SIXTY-SEVEN. THAT RESOLUTION CALLS FOR "A JUST SETTLEMENT OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM." THIS WORDING IS ECHOED IN A LATER RESOLUTION, NUMBER THREE HUNDRED THIRTY-EIGHT, PASSED IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-THREE. THERE IS SPECULATION THAT AN EFFORT MIGHT BE MADE TO CHANGE THESE RESOLUTIONS SO THAT THEY REFER SPECIFICALLY TO PALESTINIAN ARAB RIGHTS. THE ISRAELIS DON'T WANT THIS. FURTHERMORE, THE UNITED STATES HAS LONG OPPOSED ANY TAMPERING WITH THESE RESOLUTIONS, WHICH IT CONSIDERS THE ONLY REAL BASIS FOR A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. AND A STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN SAID MONDAY THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD VETO ANY

RESOLUTION THAT IS NOT HELPFUL TO THE PROGRESS OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. (OPT) INCIDENTALLY, THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF EGYPT -- ISMAIL FAHMY -- ALSO WARNED ON MONDAY AGAINST EFFORTS TO REWORD THE RESOLUTIONS. (END OPT)

SINCE CHANGING THE SUBSTANCE OF THE RESOLUTIONS WOULD INEVITABLY DRAW A VETO, THE QUESTION REMAINS WHAT ELSE NEXT WEEK'S DEBATE CAN ACCOMPLISH BEYOND THE FAMILIAR RESTATEMENT OF KNOWN POSITIONS. THE ANSWER MAY BE: NOTHING. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE DEBATE MAY OPEN AVENUES OF NEGOTIATION AND COMPROMISE NOT NOW VISIBLE. (OPT) THAT WOULD EXPLAIN WHY THE UNITED STATES -- WHICH FAVORS NEGOTIATIONS OUTSIDE THE U.N. FRAMEWORK -- HAS CALLED ITS MIDDLE EAST AMBASSADORS TO WASHINGTON FOR INTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS PRIOR TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE, AND IS INDICATING THAT IT WILL REMAIN OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITY OF POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS. (END OPT)

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